

**Environmental Advisory Council**  
**Tuesday, June 28, 2022**  
**Pendora Park**

EAC members present –D. Beane, C. Curran-Myers, W. Vitale

Others present – S. Smith, D. Chesson (via phone), S. Bachman, B. Ayers-Fisher, D. Anspach, R. Bradley, A. Rivera

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm. He noted that a quorum was not present.

All those present introduced themselves.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**CLEAN CITY COORDINATOR**

Mr. Bradley stated that two of the main focuses of his position are to gather volunteers for clean-ups and to find and clean up illegal dumping sites. He stated that he is a Reading resident and expressed the belief that each neighborhood should be responsible to keep itself clean.

Mr. Bradley described the new “Adopt-a-Block” program. He stated that the program will begin after a presentation is made to City Council. He stated that seven residents and four businesses have already registered to participate. He stated that participants will clean their block 2 – 3 times per week and arrange monthly clean-ups in their block’s radius. He noted his hope that this would bring neighbors together and build community.

Mr. Bradley stated that he would also like to address the illegal dumping done at homeless camps and to install security cameras at problem locations. He stated that Public Works cannot keep the City clean on its own.

Ms. Curran-Myers described the work that the EAC has been doing on the dumping of yard waste. She suggested working with Mr. Bradley. She noted the need for additional education about yard waste pick up and noted that this also

causes unsightly conditions. She stated that she has been working with Mr. Zeiber for appropriate signage at problem locations.

Mr. Bradley stated that he looks forward to collaborating with the EAC.

Mr. Vitale noted the problem with litter generated by corner stores. Mr. Bradley stated that he has recently met with the Property Maintenance Manager about this issue. He stated that store trash cans always seem to be overflowing. He stated that a Property Maintenance QoL sweep has recently been done on Penn St and on 5<sup>th</sup> St.

Mr. Vitale suggested that Mr. Bradley contact non-profits and churches located in the City to participate in the Adopt-a-Block program.

Evelyn Morrison arrived at this time.

Mr. Bachman stated that Property Maintenance is also learning about illicit discharges.

Mr. Bradley stated that the QoL sweep made many individual contacts to educate residents about trash and litter. Mr. Bachman described his experience in Property Maintenance and stated that some residents are not willing to interact with City staff.

### **BERNHART'S DAM UPDATE**

Mr. Beane provided background on his involvement in the remediation portion of this project. He stated that he has been active in this project since the early 2000's.

Mr. Anspach stated that he has been working on Bernhart's since February 2022. He requested a position statement from the EAC on the future state of the dam and park. He stated that this is a highly contested issue and that he will also be requesting position statements from the City's insurance carrier and design engineer. He stated that he hopes to collect this information to provide it to elected officials to make a recommendation on the future of the dam.

Mr. Anspach distributed maps showing the 2001 and 2022 lead testing results. He highlighted the areas of the former islands, which are now accessible, and the steep slope.

Ms. Smith stated that after the initial testing began, a housing development was built on the other side of the steep slope.

Mr. Beane explained that a risk assessment was done based on the park's use in its 2001 condition and access to specific areas. He stated that the removal of the dam is a change in the park's use and EPA is reassessing the area.

Mr. Anspach stated that EPA stated that there is no concern to children or adolescents if they visit the park less than 80 times per year with no additional remediation. He stated that Exide legacy funds are not available but that EPA has started a new case for the park.

Ms. Morrison questioned if only lead was discovered at the site and stated that there are other chemicals present. Ms. Curran-Myers and Mr. Anspach stated that testing for other chemicals was done in the past and were not at dangerous levels. They stated that current testing is only for lead.

Ms. Morrison questioned if other chemicals could be present now. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that lead is the only concern at this time.

Mr. Beane stated that the current recommendation for residential lead levels is 450 parts per million (ppm) but that it will be lowered to 400 ppm. He stated that most areas of the park tested at 450 ppm or lower which meets the statewide standard and will not need additional remediation.

Ms. Morrison questioned air quality in the area. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there are air quality monitors at Exide that can be reviewed in live time. Mr. Beane stated that Exide is no longer operating so there should be no air quality issues at this time.

Ms. Morrison questioned if lead got into the water source for neighboring properties. Mr. Anspach stated that most residences are on the public water supply. He stated that there is one hand dug well in use since the 1700's and he is working with that resident directly.

Mr. Anspach stated that the City was condemned for its handling of wildlife while the lake was being drained but that it followed all required permits from the Game Commission and Fish & Boat Commission. He stated that the swans are considered invasive and would have been destroyed if the City had them removed. He stated that the swans have migrated on their own and that the fish

would have been handled similarly had the dam removal not created the current, smaller pond. He explained that the bottom part of the dam was built on bedrock and the draining was permitted to cease at that level. He stated that the remaining pond is approximately 2 acres and nine feet deep. He stated that this provides significant habitat for wildlife.

Mr. Anspach stated that the draining of the lake began on April 15 to ensure that any nesting turtles had relocated.

Mr. Anspach stated that the City is currently considering two options for the dam:

- Completely remove the dam and pond to return to a stream
- Completely rebuild the dam and dam breast to retain the pond

Mr. Bradley left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if keeping the pond but at a smaller size was an option. Mr. Anspach stated that this is an option only if permitted by DEP. He stated that DEP has ordered the removal of the dam. He stated that the City has reduced the risk of the dam failing by removing the spillway. He stated that DEP has classified the dam as a high hazard dam. He stated that the City does not have the original records from the 1700's and that the valves to lower the water level no longer function.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if the lake can remain without removing the entire dam breast. Mr. Anspach noted the need to remove the entire earthen dam. He stated that he has also considered a smaller lake as it will fill itself in as a wetland. He stated that the mud catcher no longer functions. He noted the need for a use that will be enjoyed at the end of the process. He stated that keeping the lake will be a significant taxpayer investment but the City realizes that the park cannot be left in its current condition.

Ms. Morrison questioned if local residents were surveyed for their wishes for the future of the park. Mr. Anspach stated that this has not occurred yet but that he is in communication with Muhlenberg Township officials.

Ms. Smith stated that a public meeting was held in the past and most residents indicated that they wanted the lake to remain.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is a similar situation to Angelica. She expressed the belief that there has been a great result at Angelica and many people use that park.

Mr. Anspach suggested that Albright College adopt Bernhart's for environmental education in a similar way that Berks Nature has located to Angelica.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Bernhart's is a large space and is still part of the City's stormwater system.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned where Bernhart's Creek drains to. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it goes underground at the City's Northmont neighborhood and flows under First Energy Stadium and Car Tech and enters the Schuylkill River there.

Mr. Anspach stated that the river flows under the smelters at Car Tech and enters the river via a 96" outflow. He stated that Car Tech was on site at Bernhart's during the draining process to ensure that their operations were safe. He stated that Car Tech also removed all their product from the floor in case of an emergency at the dam. He stated that RAWA was also prepared to send out an emergency call to residents in case of evacuations due to flooding.

Mr. Vitale questioned if work would be needed on the dam for the smaller lake. Mr. Anspach stated that only a portion of the spillway was removed to drain the lake. He stated that the entire dam would need to be removed to the bedrock and rebuilt to current standards. He stated that the bedrock and topography of the park may be why the dam was originally built at Bernhart's.

Mr. Beane questioned the timeline for the position statement. Mr. Anspach noted his hope that the EAC would have the statement prepared within one month.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested a visit to Bernhart's to see its current condition. Mr. Beane agreed and suggested that a Zoom meeting be scheduled after the visit to draft the statement.

Mr. Anspach stated that the exposed lakebed area will be seeded after drying out more. He stated that he didn't want to see anyone get stuck in the muck. He stated that the cost to fence the area temporarily is approximately \$200,000 which would keep some people out of the area but will also prevent safe passage for wildlife. He stated that it will also be an eyesore.

Mr. Beane stated that Exide is gone and the trust is already bankrupt. He suggested investigating stimulus funding or additional Superfund resources.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the City may also be eligible for funds for environmental justice projects.

Mr. Beane stated that he will speak with Mr. Dao. He stated that Mr. Dao is great to work with and has the background needed from his prior work at Bernhart's.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is not comfortable with some of the lead levels in a public park where children play.

Mr. Anspach stated that the housing development built its stormwater system to drain into the lake near the island marked UU and out through the stream.

Ms. Morrison questioned possible future contamination at the site. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that current environmental laws in place will prevent future contamination.

Ms. Morrison expressed the belief that multiple chemicals are generally found during testing. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that EPA and DEP have tested the area in the past and had designed the prior clean-up to those findings. She stated that lead is the most common problem at battery manufacturing locations.

Ms. Morrison questioned if contamination may enter the creek below Bernhart's from the former AT & T operations. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this would have been researched by Exide so that AT & T would bear some of the cost of the clean-up and the negative publicity. Mr. Beane agreed and stated that the initial risk assessment would have identified other potential sources of contamination.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the PH level of the lake and creek have been high enough to offset the lead issues.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that there is also carbon holding the lead that remains.

Ms. Morrison questioned if medical results were pursued. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that all neighbors were tested by the PA Dept of Health. She stated that Ms. Morrison can research resident lead levels by census tract. She stated that blood lead levels are monitored very closely.

Mr. Anspach stated that he looks forward to learning the EAC's position.

The EAC will meet at Bernhart's Park on Friday, July 8 at noon. Members are asked to park in the parking lot to walk the park as a group and to wear shoes / boots that can get muddy.

Mr. Anspach noted his hope to make the most people happy with the park results.

Ms. Morrison noted the importance of public engagement. Mr. Anspach stated that most input will be from residents of Muhlenberg Township due to the location of the park. He stated that he always works to collaborate with residents.

Mr. Anspach left the meeting at this time.

### **EAC LOGO**

The EAC reviewed the current drafts of the logo. They agreed to use option A with the lettering style of option C.

### **BCTV**

Mr. Beane stated that Mr. Bradley will be his guest for the July program. He stated that the program will be prerecorded if necessary due to scheduling issues.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher was the guest for his program. He stated that they discussed Bernhart's.

### **COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE**

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee continues to work on a plan and ways to engage the community. He stated that the message and the process need to move forward together. He stated that Mr. Nazario is pressing the issue of EAC membership better reflecting the community and that this also needs a plan. He stated that the community can serve on the EAC or participate as committee members.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC has been networking and working to attend community events. She noted the need to start dialogs in the neighborhoods.

Ms. Morrison noted the need for information to be released in Spanish. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is already being worked on. She noted the need to build the capacity of the EAC with additional members.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that progress is being made.

### **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City has re-entered the LCAP program to finish drafting the Plan and to learn how to compile the greenhouse gas inventory.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned when the program begins. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will begin in early September.

### **LEAD ABATEMENT**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this program will be managed by Property Maintenance. She stated that outreach has begun and suggested that the EAC have a presentation at the August or September meeting. She stated that families are being identified to participate.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 9 at noon at Pendora Park lower pavilion, weather permitting. The pavilion is located at S 18<sup>th</sup> & Forest Sts and off street parking is available.

The meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by  
*Shelly Smith, CMC*  
Deputy City Clerk